

English 9151A
Prof. Alison Conway
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Arts and Humanities 3G16
Office hours: Wed. 9 a.m.-noon and by appointment

The Postsecular Eighteenth Century

For a variety of reasons, eighteenth-century studies has been slow to make the “religious turn” familiar to critics working in other literary fields. This course examines why this has been the case and what a “religious turn” in this field might look like. It also seeks to move beyond the secular/religion divide by engaging with theorists of postsecularism, who have re-fashioned our understandings of these terms and their evolution since the Reformation. Focusing on the eighteenth-century novel, the genre most often identified with the “secularization thesis,” we will investigate how religious controversy, materialist philosophy, and new understandings of sociability—as well as developments of form—contributed to the genre’s early “postsecular” history. We will also consider, more specifically, how feminist theory engages with postsecularism and study the intersection of gender, sexuality, and religion through close readings of Richardson’s *Clarissa* and Austen’s *Mansfield Park*.

Course Texts

Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year* (Penguin)
Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (unabridged) (Penguin)
Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Oxford)
Selected readings in theory and criticism

Sept. 12: Introduction: Kauffman, “The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies”; Pecorra, “Secularization and Cultural Criticism”; Fessenden, “The Problem of the Postsecular”

Sept. 19: Secularism and its Discontent: Habermas, “An Awareness of What is Missing”; Asad, “Introduction” to *Formations of the Secular*; Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation”

Sept. 26: Novel Studies
Seidel, “Beyond the Religious and the Secular in the History of the Novel”
Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*
Response paper 1 (all)

Oct. 1: Women and Postsecularism

Sands, "Feminisms and Secularisms"; Kauffman, "Post-secular Puritans"; Abbas, "The Echo Chamber of Freedom: the Muslim Woman and the Pretext of Agency"

Oct 9—reading week

Oct. 16: library session on advanced research methods; eighteenth-century studies & theory

Oct. 25: *Clarissa* vols. 1 & 2

Stuber, "*Clarissa*: A Religious Novel?"

Response paper 2 (group A)

Nov. 1 *Clarissa* vols. 3&4

Chaber, "Christian Form and Anti-Feminism in *Clarissa*"

Response paper 2 (group B)

Nov. 8 *Clarissa* vols. 5-6

Doody, "Gnostic *Clarissa*"

Response paper 3 (group A)

Nov. 15 *Clarissa* vol. 7

Taylor, "*Clarissa* and the Problem of Heaven"

Response paper 3 (group B)

Nov. 22: Austen, *Mansfield Park*, vol. 1

Jager, "Mansfield Park and the end of natural theology"

Response paper 4 (group A)

Nov. 30 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, vol. 2

Mason and Knight, "Evangelicalism: Bronte to Eliot"

Response paper 4 (group B)

Dec. 6 Austen *Mansfield Park*, vol. 3

Wiltshire, "The Story of Fanny Price"

Response paper 5 (all)

Course requirements

Your final grade will be arrived at as follows:

Seminars: 30%

Essay: 40%

Response Papers: 20%:

In-class participation: 10%

Seminars (15% each)

You are required to present a short seminar on two of the three novels we are reading. In each seminar, you should engage the theoretical models we studied for the first four weeks of class. Your seminar should be no longer than 15 minutes, and it should engage a particular moment in the text or a specific topic central to our reading for the day. You need to bring a 6-7 pp. write up to hand in on the day of your presentation. You do not need to write a response paper on the days you are presenting.

Response Papers (4@5%; 20%)

You are required to send me a response paper (2 pp; 600 words) on each of the novels we are reading; **submit by email by Monday at 4 p.m.** You should focus your discussion on a key passage or idea; do not summarize or generalize.

Research Paper (4500 words: 15 pp):

For your final research paper you are responsible for writing on one of the novels we've read. You are required to incorporate theory into your analysis.

Due: Dec. 20

Course Policies

Laptops: I do not permit the use of laptops in the classroom unless a student has been granted accommodation by the Student Learning Centre.

Please be sure to bring print copies of the criticism we are reading, which you can download from the links provided.

Plagiarism

The Senate of the University of Western Ontario writes:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words.

Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of a text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations.

Plagiarism is a major academic offense. See the Scholastic Offence Policy in Western Academic Calendar:

http://uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Mental Health: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.